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SUBJECT: URIBE HEARS WAR DRUMS IN VENEZUELA

REF: A) BOGOTA 3313; B) CARACAS 1426

CLASSIFIED BY: William R. Brownfield, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (S) Just after meeting with President Uribe and the military high command, Minister of Defense Gabriel Silva called the Ambassador on the evening of November 8. They believe that Venezuelan President Chavez' public declarations earlier that afternoon represented a major ratcheting up of war rhetoric. The GOC regards the rhetoric as threatening. Silva acknowledged that the GOC and USG analyzed Chavez' intentions differently, but he asked for two actions by the USG:

-- First, an immediate analysis of Venezuelan military movements toward the border, and accelerated real time intelligence on such movements in the future.

-- Second, some sort of USG public comment on Chavez' warlike rhetoric.

The Ambassador said he was unaware (at that time) of Chavez' latest declarations; he would work to accelerate our analysis of possible military movements on the Venezuelan side of the border; and he would consult with Washington on any USG public response.

¶2. (C) Immediately after the MOD call, President Uribe called the Ambassador. Uribe repeated most of Silva's points about Chavez' latest rhetoric. He said the latest uptick was something he could not ignore, as Colombian public opinion would not permit it. He had to respond in some way. Uribe planned to release a communique that evening (Note: It was released and covered in the morning press. End note.) making four points:

-- GOC did not seek armed conflict with any other nation.

-- Colombian military efforts were directed against narcotrafficking and terrorism.

-- GOC supported resolving differences by dialogue through international law.

-- But in light of Chavez' latest declarations, GOC would submit

this matter to the UN Security Council and the Organization of American States (OAS).

¶3. (S) Uribe asked what the Ambassador advised. The Ambassador asked if he had spoken to Brazilian President Lula. Uribe said no, but he would do so. The Ambassador suggested that Uribe ask himself what Chavez would want him to do, and then do something different. If Chavez wanted him to respond with heated rhetoric that would help him conceal internal problems in Venezuela from his own people, then Uribe should not fall into that trap. Uribe agreed. He asked for any further advice the USG might offer.

¶4. (S) AMBASSADOR'S COMMENT: This is further evidence that the Colombians are working themselves into a sweat over the potential military threat from Venezuela. We will work directly with SouthCom and ORA on the GOC request for accelerated intelligence on military movements in Venezuela. We do not regard Chavez' latest blast as a significant increase over what he has already said, and do not necessarily recommend that Washington treat this as a genuine crisis. Obviously, we will have to determine our posture should the GOC submit this issue to the Security Council or OAS. Equally obviously, we should factor into our thinking the fact that the GOC has become almost neuralgic about the Venezuela threat. Correct or not, it is something we must consider as we make our own policy decisions in the region. End Comment.
BROWNFIELD